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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General appeals to High-level Working Group for urgent assistance to deal with United Nations financial crisis; warns Organization will begin fiftieth anniversary without resources to carry out its mission.

* Security Council mission warns Western Sahara referendum might not be held in January 1996; parties must cooperate and MINURSO must be given adequate resources if timetable is to be maintained.

* UNHCR convoys deliver 400 metric tons of food to Sarajevo; Bosnian Government forces continue to blockade United Nations peace-keepers in Visoko.

* International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to begin first plenary session in The Hague on Monday; judges to elect President and adopt rules of procedure and evidence.

* NGO role in Middle East must be redefined, Symposium on Palestine is told; United Nations to hold seminar on Palestinian administrative and financial needs.

* Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space discusses holding third international conference on space cooperation, and spin-off benefits of space exploration and research.

* UNEP and ECE to hold regional meeting on military activities and environment in Sweden from 27 to 30 June.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today appealed to the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the financial situation of the United Nations for urgent assistance. He asked it to address every possible way of relieving the current financial crisis, which he described as deplorable. "Should we fail to

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find a solution," he warned, "the United Nations will commence its fiftieth anniversary as a debt-encumbered Organization lacking the financial resources to carry out the mission that Member States intend it to perform."

As of 31 May, Member States owed the United Nations some $2.8 billion in unpaid assessments, the Secretary-General said. Only 48 Members had paid their regular budget contributions in full. Meanwhile, the Organization had debts of about $1.5 billion, and the crisis was deepening. He noted the growing practice of Member States to call for new or expanded United Nations activities without appropriating the necessary resources, further depleting very limited cash resources. If the Organization continued to pay countries for troops and equipment, it would only have $200 million in cash at year-end, which would not cover expenditures for three weeks.

"This means that I am being pressured to engage in irresponsible financial management," he continued. "In other words, I have been given the authority to spend money that I do not have, without a clear assurance that the necessary funds will be provided." He urged Member States to provide the cash to cover those activities without delay, and appealed to those with substantial arrears to make special efforts to pay a significant part of their outstanding assessments.

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There is a real risk that the referendum in Western Sahara might not be held in January 1996, according to the Security Council mission which recently visited the region. In a report dated 21 June, the mission expressed concern that the time necessary for carrying out the identification process and other aspects of the settlement plan had been underestimated. It cited the complexity of the tasks to be performed, the continuing delays caused by the parties and the constraints imposed by limited resources and local conditions.

For there to be any realistic hope of maintaining the timetable, the parties must cooperate and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) must be given the necessary resources, the report said. It strongly recommended that the parties abandon their insistence on reciprocity in the number and operation of identification centres on each side. They must also refrain from blaming their lack of cooperation on each other.

The mission called on the parties not to inhibit access to identification centres and to take all necessary steps to facilitate a free and fair process. It acknowledged that some progress had been made in recent weeks, and underscored that, while fairness must be guaranteed, such progress must be sustained and improved to allow the referendum to take place early next year.

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Three United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) convoys reached Sarajevo yesterday, carrying a total of 400 metric tons of food, according to a spokesman for the Organization. However, the Bosnian Serbs turned two convoys back from the city today. United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) resupply convoys reached Zepa yesterday and Gorazde today, although a UNHCR convoy remained stuck outside Gorazde pending clearance from the Bosnian Serbs.

Meanwhile, the Bosnian Government Army continued to blockade Canadian, Malaysian and Pakistani peace-keepers in Visoko, the spokesman noted. However, some of the restrictions on the Canadian base were eased, albeit briefly, today. A convoy of soldiers was allowed to leave the base this morning, and negotiations were underway for the resupplying of three observation posts in the area.

There were around 1,000 firing incidents in Sarajevo yesterday, continuing a downward trend. However, one shell killed at least 4 civilians and wounded 15 others. There were also moderate levels of military activity in the Tuzla area. The United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO) reported renewed shelling in Sector South this afternoon.

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The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda will officially begin work next Monday with the opening of its first plenary session in The Hague. The Tribunal's 11 judges will meet for one week at the headquarters of the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. They will be sworn in on Tuesday, and will then elect the President of the Tribunal and adopt the rules of procedure and evidence.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was established by the Security Council, in resolution 955 (1994), to prosecute persons who committed genocide and other serious violations of humanitarian law between 1 January and 31 December 1994. It is a subsidiary organ of the Council and will function independently of political considerations. The Tribunal's headquarters will be established in Arusha, Tanzania.

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With the Middle East peace process verging on collapse, the future role of non-governmental organizations must be redefined, according to the President of the Red Crescent Society in Gaza. Dr. Haider Abdel Shafi told the North American NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine that the international community had sacrificed principle to political expediency. International NGOs should unite in calling on democratic governments to fulfil their commitments regarding

justice and legality in the Middle East. He made those comments at the end of a three-day session on "The United Nations on its Fiftieth Anniversary and the Question of Palestine."

"We have yet to witness significant transformation in the way in which the United States mainstream press is reporting on developments in relation to this issue," said Larry Ekin, Chairman of the North American Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine. The NGO community should be a source of reliable information and a voice of conscience.

Meanwhile, a seminar on Palestinian administrative, managerial and financial needs and challenges will be held in Paris from 28 to 30 June. Participants will review the role of international assistance in meeting those needs, and discuss selected themes. The seminar is being held under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

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The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, continuing its session in Vienna, has discussed the holding of a third international conference on space cooperation. However, consensus proved elusive as the Committee concluded its debate on follow-up to the second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE 82).

The United Kingdom representative said the Committee should examine what could be achieved by alternative means before proceeding with plans for a third conference. South Africa's representative said there could be no substitute for an international conference, which would be particularly important to developing countries.

The Committee has also discussed the spin-off benefits of space exploration and research. The United States representative said the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had developed a robotic assistant for assembling and servicing spacecraft. Such a device had subsequently been used in neurosurgery and gall-bladder removals.

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The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) will hold a regional meeting on military activities and the environment in Linkoping, Sweden, from 27 to 30 June. The meeting will be hosted by the Swedish Government.

Routine military operations can take as great an environmental toll in peacetime as in wartime, especially in the area of hazardous waste treatment and disposal, according to UNEP. However, the military in many countries can provide

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the expertise needed to address the problem. As a result, members of the ECE, including all European countries, Canada, Israel and the United States, have been invited to send both military and environmental representatives to the Linkoping meeting.

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